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Essential Questions

What Is An Essential Question?

It is the essence of what your students will examine and learn in the course of their study. Essential questions stem from your planning around what you want your students to deeply understand about the concept they are studying, and how they can apply their understanding of the foundational “big ideas” to their world.

Essential Questions...

- Have no one right answer
- Can be answered by all students
- Enable all students to learn
- Involve thinking, not just answering
- Make students investigators
- Are provocative – they hook students into wanting to learn
- Offer a sense of adventure, are fun to explore and try to answer
- Require students to connect learning from different disciplines
- Challenge students to demonstrate that they understand the relationship between what they are learning and larger world issues
- Enable students to value and integrate their own experience or understanding

How Do You Write Essential Questions?

1. Create a reasonable number (1-3 per unit of study).
2. Frame your questions in “kid friendly” language that makes them engaging and thought provoking.
3. Design questions that reflect the standards and “big ideas” of your content area.
4. Begin essential questions with “how” or “why” instead of with “what”.
5. Sequence your questions so they lead naturally from one to another.
6. Remember: If a question is too specific, or can be answered with a few words or a sentence, it is probably not essential.

-Sample Questions-

Curriculum Content	Student Focus Topics	Research Problems	Essential Questions
Grade 8 The Constitution: Westward Expansion	Outlaws, women, immigrants, ranchers, farmers, native Americans	What role did the government play in the lives of (<u>topic</u>) in the American West?	How does the US Constitution influence people’s lives?
Grade 7 World Cultures Pacific Rim	Religion, traditions, economic systems, education, family life	What are some of the unique qualities of (<u>topic</u>) in this culture?	How can Americans be good members of the “global village”?
Grade 6 Ancient Egyptian Civilization	Transportation, health and medicine, clothing, housing, religion	How was (<u>topic</u>) affected by the environment?	How does environment affect the development of culture and civilization?

POST THE QUESTIONS IN YOUR ROOM AS A LEARNING FOCUS FOR YOUR STUDENTS